

Nigerian People and Culture

Nigeria has more than 300 ethnic groups with diverse languages, culture and beliefs, but is predominantly divided into three major ethnic groups, Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba. Historically, there was in Nigeria until the amalgamation in 1914 there were before then there were empires where villages came under; these are Songhai Empires consisting majorly of the northern states, the Oyo Empire holding the south-west and the Benin Empire for the South-east.

Long before 1500 much of modern Nigeria was divided into states identified with contemporary ethnic groups. These early states included the Yoruba kingdoms, the Igbo Kingdom of Nri, the Edo State kingdom of Benin, the Hausa cities, and Nupe. Additionally numerous small states to the west and south of Lake Chad were absorbed or displaced in the course of the expansion of Kanem, which was centered to the northeast of Lake Chad. Bornu, initially the western province of Kanem, became independent in the late 14th century. Other states probably existed but the absence of archaeological data prevents accurate dating. In the southeast, the earliest Igbo state was Nri which emerged in 900 AD. Despite its relatively small size geographically it is considered the cradle of Igbo culture.

These kingdoms developed in the context of the trans-Saharan slave trade, but they peaked in power in the late 18th century, thriving on the Atlantic slave trade due to the great demand for slaves by the European colonies. During and after the Napoleonic period, the western powers gradually abolished slavery, which led to a collapse in demand and consequently a decline of the West African empires, and the gradual increase of western influence during the 19th century (the "Scramble for Africa"), in the case of Nigeria concluding with the British protectorates of Northern and Southern Nigeria in 1900.

The Political Institution

The maintenance of law and order in society constitutes the major demand in the efficient use of traditional political power. Government in whatever form is expected to provide the management, direction and control required for efficient law and order.

In the traditional political system, two paramount systems can be identified: the monarchical and non-monarchical. What is important to emphasise in the two is that they are a mixed-bag in contents and contexts in the political system. It may describe a kingdom (monarchy), republican (stateless) or city-state. The capacity of the political system is to enter into socio-political and economic relations with other neighbours. This becomes an important issue in traditional political practices.

As we have noted earlier, we identify the nuclear family as the smaller unit of social

and political organisation. This is in the sense that the oldest male family member is conferred with the title as head of a family unit. In this capacity, he controls the political, economic affairs and the fortunes of family members. Besides, he is regarded as the custodian of the family tradition and ancestral cults. In this position, he acts as the intermediary between the family's ancestors and the living members.

At the village level (based on extended family structure) the family is fused into a larger village political state. This is because, the village is regarded as a state, and each is independent of each other. And by this arrangement, each village state maintains its territorial independence, tolerating no interference in its internal affairs. Also, recognising no other authority except the one within its territorial boundary.

Songhai Empire

The Songhai state has existed in one form or another for over a thousand years, if one traces its rulers from the settlement of Gao to Songhai's vassal status under the Mali Empire to its continuation in Niger as the Dendi Kingdom.

The Songhai is thought to have settled at Gao as early as 800 CE, but did not establish the city as their capital until the 11th century, during the reign of Dia Kossou.

Sonny Ali was credited to have founded, established and enriched the empire through his brutality and tyranny, but his successor Askia Mohammed Ture (also known as Askia the Great) is said to have influenced the empire with his Islamic religion thus the dominance of the religion to the empire.

At its peak, the Songhai city of Timbuktu became a thriving cultural and commercial centre. Arab, Italian, and Jewish merchants all gathered for trade. A revival of Islamic scholarship also took place at the university in Timbuktu. However, Timbuktu was but one of a myriad of cities throughout the empire. By 1500, the Songhai Empire covered over 14 million square kilometres.

Economy

Economic trade existed throughout the Empire, due to the standing army stationed in the provinces. Central to the regional economy were independent gold fields. The *Julla* (merchants) would form partnerships, and the state would protect these merchants and the port cities of the Niger. It was a very strong trading kingdom, known for its production of practical crafts as well as religious artefacts.

The Songhai economy was based on a clan system. The clan a person belonged to ultimately decided one's occupation. The most common were metalworkers, fishermen, and carpenters. Lower caste participants consisted of mostly non-farm working immigrants, who at times were provided special privileges and held high positions in society. At the top were noblemen and direct descendants of the original

Songhai people, followed by freemen and traders. At the bottom were war captives and European slaves obligated to labour, especially in farming. James Olson describes the labour system as resembling modern day unions, with the Empire possessing craft guilds that consisted of various mechanics and artisans.

Criminal justice

Criminal justice in Songhai was based mainly, if not entirely, on Islamic principles, especially during the rule of Askia Muhammad. In addition to this was the local *qadis*, whose responsibility was to maintain order by following *Sharia* law under Islamic domination, according to the Qur'an. An additional *qadi* was noted as a necessity in order to settle minor disputes between immigrant merchants. Kings usually did not judge a defendant; however, under special circumstances, such as acts of treason, they felt an obligation to do so and thus exert their authority. Results of a trial were announced by the "town crier" and punishment for most trivial crimes usually consisted of confiscation of merchandise or even imprisonment, since various prisons existed throughout the Empire.^[1]

Qadis worked at the local level and were positioned in important trading towns, such as Timbuktu and Djenné. The Qadi was appointed by the king and dealt with common-law misdemeanours according to *Sharia* law. The Qadi also had the power to grant a pardon or offer refuge. The *Assara-munidios*, or "enforcers" worked along the lines of a police commissioner whose sole duty was to execute sentencing. Jurists were mainly composed of those representing the academic community; professors were often noted as taking administrative positions within the Empire and many aspired to be *qadis*.

Government

Upper classes in society converted to Islam while lower classes often continued to follow traditional religions. Sermons emphasized obedience to the king. Timbuktu was the educational capital. Sonni Ali established a system of government under the royal court, later to be expanded by Askia Muhammad, which appointed governors and mayors to preside over local tributary states, situated around the Niger valley. Local chiefs were still granted authority over their respective domains as long as they did not undermine Songhai policy.^[2]

Tax was imposed on peripheral chiefdoms and provinces to ensure the dominance of Songhai, and in return these provinces were given almost complete autonomy. Songhai rulers only intervened in the affairs of these neighbouring states when a situation became volatile; usually an isolated incident. Each town was represented by government officials, holding positions and responsibilities similar to today's central bureaucrats.

Under Askia Muhammad, the Empire saw increased centralization. He encouraged learning in Timbuktu by rewarding its professors with larger pensions as an incentive. He also established an order of precedence and protocol and was noted as a noble man who gave back generously to the poor. Under his policies, Muhammad brought much stability to Songhai and great achievements of this noted organization

are still preserved in the works of Maghrebin writers such as Leo Africanus, among others

Oyo Empire

The Oyo Empire was a Yoruba empire of what is today called south-west of Nigeria. Established in the 14th century, the Oyo Empire grew to become one of the largest West African states encountered by pre-colonial explorers. It rose through the outstanding organizational skills of the Yoruba, wealth gained from trade and its powerful cavalry. The Oyo Empire was the most politically important state in the region from the mid-17th to the late 18th century

The mythical origins of the Oyo Empire lie with Oranyan (also known as Oranmiyan), the second prince of the Yoruba Kingdom of Ile-Ife (Ife). Oranyan made an agreement with his brother to launch a punitive raid on their northern neighbours for insulting their father Oba (King) Oduduwa, the first Ooni of Ife. On the way to the battle, the brothers quarrelled and the army split up. Oranyan's force was too small to make a successful attack, so he wandered the southern shore until reaching Bussa. There the local chief entertained him and provided a large snake with a magic charm attached to its throat.

The chief instructed Oranyan to follow the snake until it stopped somewhere for seven days and disappeared into the ground. Oranyan followed the advice and founded Oyo where the serpent stopped. The site is remembered as Ajaka. Oranyan made Oyo his new kingdom and became the first "oba" (meaning 'king' or 'ruler' in the Yoruba language) with the title of "Alaafin of Oyo" (Alaafin means 'owner of the palace' in Yoruba). He left all his treasures in Ife and allowed another king named Adimu to rule there.

Oranyan, the first oba (king) of Oyo, was succeeded by Oba Ajaka, Alaafin of Oyo. Ajaka was deposed, because he lacked Yoruba military virtue and allowed his sub-chiefs too much independence. Leadership was then conferred upon Ajaka's brother, Shango, who was later deified as the deity of thunder and lightning. Ajaka was restored after Shango's death. Ajaka returned to the throne thoroughly more warlike and oppressive. His successor, Kori, managed to conquer the rest of what later historians would refer to as metropolitan Oyo.

The heart of metropolitan Oyo was its capital at Oyo-Ile, (also known as *Katunga* or *Ad Oyo* or Oyo-or-o). The two most important structures in Oyo-Ile was the 'afin,' or palace of the Oba, and his market. The palace was at the centre of the city close to the Oba's market called 'Qa-oba'. Around the capital was a tall earthen wall for defence with 17 gates. The importance of the two large structures (the palace and the Qa Oba) signified the importance of the king in Oyo.

Organization

At the beginning, the people were concentrated in metropolitan Oyo. With imperial expansion, Oyo reorganized to better manage its vast holdings within and outside of Yorubaland. It was divided into four layers defined by relation to the core of the

empire. These layers were Metropolitan Oyo, southern Yorubaland, the Egbado Corridor and Ajaland.

- Metropolitan Oyo

Metropolitan Oyo corresponded, more or less, to the Oyo state prior to the Nupe invasion. This was the hub of the empire, where the Yoruba spoke the Oyo dialect. Metropolitan Oyo was divided into six provinces, with three on the west side of the Ogun River and three to the river's east. Each province was supervised by a governor appointed directly by the Alaafin of Oyo.

- Yorubaland

The second layer of the empire was composed of the towns closest to Oyo-Ile, which were recognized as brothers. This area was south of metropolitan Oyo and its Yoruba inhabitants spoke different dialects from that of Oyo. These tributary states were led by their own rulers, titled Obas, who were confirmed by the Alaafin of Oyo.

- Egbado Corridor

The empire's third layer was the Egbado Corridor southwest of Yorubaland. This area was inhabited by the Egba and Egbado, and guaranteed Oyo's trade with the coast. The Egba and Egbado tributaries were allowed, like their Yoruba counterparts, to rule themselves. They were, however, supervised by Ajele.^[20] These were agents appointed by the Alaafin of Oyo to oversee his interest and monitor commerce. The lead representative of Oyo in the corridor was the Olu, ruler of the town of Ilaro.

- Ajaland

Ajaland was the last layer added to the empire. It was the most restive and distant, and kept in line with threats of expeditions against it. This territory extended from the non-Yoruba areas west of the Egbado Corridor far into Ewe controlled territory in modern Togo. This area, like all tributary states, was allowed a fair degree of autonomy as long as taxes were paid, the orders from Oyo were strictly followed, and access to local markets was provided to Oyo merchants. The Oyo often demanded tribute in slaves. The tributary sometimes made war on other peoples to capture slaves for this. Oyo punished disobedience by wholesale slaughter of the community, as it accomplished in Alada in 1698.

Yorubaland

Political structure

The Oyo Empire developed a highly sophisticated political structure to govern its territorial domains. Scholars have not determined how much of this structure existed prior to the Nupe invasion. Some of Oyo's institutions are clearly derivative of early accomplishments in Ife. After reemerging from exile in the early 17th century,

Oyo took on a noticeably more militant character. The influence of an aggressive Yoruba culture is exemplified in the standards placed on the oba (king) and the roles of his council.

The Alaafin of Oyo

The oba (meaning 'king' in the Yoruba language) at Oyo, who was referred to as the Alaafin of Oyo, (Alaafin means 'owner of the palace' in Yoruba), was the head of the empire and supreme overlord of the people. He was responsible for keeping tributaries safe from attack, settling internal quarrels between sub-rulers, and mediating between those sub-rulers and their people. The Alaafin of Oyo was also expected to give his subordinates honors and presents. In return, all sub-rulers had to pay homage to the Oba and renew their allegiance at annual ceremonies. The most important of these was the Bere festival, marking the acclamation of successful rule by the Alaafin. After the Bere festival, peace in Yorubaland was supposed to last for three years.

Selection of the Alaafin

The Oyo Empire was not a hereditary monarchy, nor an absolute one. The Oyomesi selected the Alaafin. He was not always directly related to his predecessor, although he did have to be descended from Oranyan (also known as Oranmiyan), a son of Oduduwa (also known as Odudua, Odua) and to hail from the Ona Isokun ward (which is one of the three royal wards). At the beginning of the Oyo Empire, usually the Alaafin's oldest son succeeded his father to the throne. But, this sometimes led to the oldest son, i.e. the first-born prince, the Aremo, hastening the death of his father. Independently of the possible succession, the Aremo was quite powerful in his own right. For instance, by custom the Alaafin abstained from leaving the palace, except during the important festivals, which in practice curtailed his power. By contrast, the Aremo often left the palace. The two councils which checked the Alaafin had a tendency to select a weak Alaafin after the reign of a strong one to keep the office from becoming too powerful.

The Ilari

The Alaafin of Oyo appointed certain religious and government officials, who were usually eunuchs. These officials were known as the *ilari* or half-heads, because of the custom of shaving half of their heads and applying what was believed to be a magical substance into it. The hundreds of Ilari were divided evenly among the sexes. Junior members of the Ilari did menial tasks, while seniors acted as guards or sometimes messengers to the other world via sacrifice. Their titles related to the king, such as *oba l'olu* ("the king is supreme") or *madarikan* ("do not oppose him"). They carried red

and green fans as credentials of their status. All sub-courts of Oyo had Ilari who acted as both spies and taxmen. Oyo appointed these to visit and sometimes reside in Dahomey and the Egbado Corridor to collect taxes and spy on Dahomey's military successes, so that the Alaafin of Oyo could get his cut. Similar officials had existed in Ife, as attested by terracotta art depicting them.

The Councils

While the Alaafin of Oyo was supreme overlord of the people, he was not without checks on his power. The Oyomesi and the Yoruba Earth cult known as Ogboni kept the Oba's power in check. The Oyomesi spoke for the politicians while The Ogboni spoke for the people backed by the power of religion. The power of the Alaafin of Oyo in relation to the Oyomesi and Ogboni depended on his personal character and political shrewdness.

The Oyomesi were seven principal councilors of the state. They constituted the Electoral Council and possessed legislative powers, similar to today's United States Congress. The Bashorun, Agbaakin, Samu, Alapini, Laguna, Akiniku and an Ashipa are the seven members of this council. They represented the voice of the nation and had the chief responsibility of protecting the interests of the empire. The Alaafin was required to take counsel with them whenever any important matter affecting the state occurs. Each man had a state duty to perform at court every morning and afternoon. Each Oyomesi had a deputy whom they would send to the Alaafin if his absence was unavoidable.

They controlled the military. The head of the council, the Bashorun, consulted the Ifa oracle for approval from the gods. New alaafins of Oyo were seen as appointed by the gods. They were regarded as *Ekeji Orisa*, meaning "companion of the gods." The Bashorun was a sort of prime minister. He had the final say on the nomination of the new Alaafin. *The Oyomesi developed as a check on the Alaafin's power.* The Bashorun's power rivaled that of the Alaafin. For example, the Bashorun orchestrated many religious festivals; in addition to being commander-in-chief of the army, this gave him considerable independent religious authority.

The Ogboni

The Oyomesi does not enjoy an absolute power or influence, and while the Oyomesi may wield political influence, the Ogboni represented the popular opinion backed by the authority of religion, and therefore the view of the Oyomesi could be moderated by the Ogboni. And most interestingly, there are checks and balances on the power of the Alaafin and the Oyomesi and thus no one is arrogated absolute power. The Ogboni was a very powerful secret society composed of freemen noted for their age,

wisdom and importance in religious and political affairs. Its members enjoyed immense power over the common people due to their religious station. A testament to how widespread the institution was is the fact that there were Ogboni councils at nearly all sub-courts within Yorubaland. Aside from their duties in respect to the worship of the earth, they were responsible for judging any case dealing with the spilling of blood. The leader of the Ogboni, the Oluwo, had the unqualified right of direct access to the Alaafin of Oyo on any matter.

Removing an Alaafin of Oyo

Chief among the responsibilities of the Bashorun was the all-important festival of Orun. This religious divination, held every year, was to determine if the members of the Oyomesi still held favor with the Alaafin. If the council decided on the disapproval of the Alaafin, the Bashorun presented the Alaafin with an empty calabash, or parrot's egg as a sign that he must commit suicide. This was the only way to remove the Alaafin because he could not be legally deposed. Once given the parrot's egg, the Bashorun would proclaim, "the gods reject you, the people reject you, the earth rejects you." The Alaafin, his eldest son, and the Samu, his personal counselor and a member of the Oyomesi all had to commit suicide in order to renew the government altogether. The process and suicide ceremony took place during the Orun festival.

Military

There was a high degree of professionalism in the army of the Oyo Empire. Its military success was due in large part to its cavalry as well as the leadership and courage of Oyo officers and warriors. Because its main geographic focus was north of the forest, Oyo enjoyed easier farming and thus a steady growth in population. This contributed to Oyo's ability to consistently field a large force. There was also an entrenched military culture in Oyo where victory was obligatory and defeat carried the duty of committing suicide. This do-or-die policy no doubt contributed to the military aggressiveness of Oyo's generals.

Structure

The Oyo Empire, like many empires before it, used both local and tributary forces to expand its domains. The structure of the Oyo military prior to its imperial period was simple and closer aligned to the central government in metropolitan Oyo. This may have been fine in the 15th century when Oyo controlled only its heartland. But to make and maintain farther conquest, the structure underwent several changes.

Benin Empire

The Benin Empire (1440–1897) was a pre-colonial empire; with its capital Benin City now located in Edo state in what is now Nigeria.

The original people and founders of the Benin Empire, the Edo people, were initially ruled by the Ogiso (Kings of the Sky) dynasty who called their land Igodomigodo. The rulers or kings were commonly known as Ogiso. Igodo, the first Ogiso, wielded much influence and gained popularity as a good ruler.

The Oba had become the paramount power within the region. Oba Ewuare, the first *Golden Age* Oba, is credited with turning Benin City into City States from a military fortress built by Ogiso, protected by moats and walls. It was from this bastion that he launched his military campaigns and began the expansion of the kingdom from the Edo-speaking heartlands.

Oba Ewuare was a direct descendant of Eweka I great grandson of Oduduwa, Oni of Ife.

A series of walls marked the incremental growth of the sacred city from 850 AD until its decline in the 16th century. In the 15th century Benin became the greatest city of the empire created by Oba Ewuare. To enclose his palace he commanded the building of Benin's inner wall, a seven-mile (11km) long earthen rampart girded by a moat 50 feet (15m) deep. This was excavated in the early 1960s by Graham Connah. Connah estimated that its construction, if spread out over five dry seasons, would have required a workforce of 1000 laborers working ten hours a day seven days a week. Ewuare also added great thoroughfares and erected nine fortified gateways.

Excavations also uncovered a rural network of earthen walls 4 to 8 thousand miles long that would have taken an estimated 150 million man hours to build and must have taken hundreds of years to build. These were apparently raised to mark out territories for towns and cities. Thirteen years after Ewuare's death tales of Benin's splendors lured more Portuguese traders to the city gates.

At its maximum extent, the empire extended from the western Ibo tribes on the shores of the Niger River, through parts of the southwestern region of Nigeria (much of present day Ondo State, and the isolated islands (current Lagos Island and Obalende) in the coastal region of present day Lagos State). The Oyo Kingdom, which extended through most of Southwestern Nigeria to parts of present day Republic of Benin, was to the West.

The state developed an advanced artistic culture, especially in its famous artifacts of bronze, iron and ivory. These include bronze wall plaques and life-sized bronze heads depicting the Obas of Benin. The most common artifact is based on Queen Idia, now best known as the FESTAC Mask after its use in 1977 in the logo of the Nigeria-financed and hosted Second Festival of Black & African Arts and Culture (FESTAC 77).

Nri Kingdom

The Kingdom of Nri (Igbo: *Oráéze Nri*) (948–1911) was the West African medieval state of the Nri-Igbo, a subgroup of the Igbo people. The Kingdom of Nri was unusual in the history of world government in that its leader exercised no military power over his subjects. The kingdom existed as a sphere of religious and political influence over a third of Igboland, and was administered by a priest-king called the *eze Nri*. The *eze Nri* managed trade and diplomacy on behalf of the Igbo people, and possessed divine authority in religious matters.

The kingdom was a safe haven for all those who had been rejected in their communities and also a place where slaves were set free from their bondage. Nri expanded through converts gaining neighboring communities' allegiance, not by force. Nri's royal founder, Eri, is said to be a 'sky being' that came down to earth and then established civilization. One of the better-known remnants of the Nri civilization is its art, as manifested in the Igbo Ukwu bronze items.

Nri's culture had permanently influenced the Northern and Western Igbo, especially through religion and taboos. British colonialism, as well as the Atlantic slave trade and the rise of Bini and Igala kingdoms, contributed to the decline of the Nri Kingdom. The Nri Kingdom is presently going through a cultural revival.

The Nri kingdom is considered to be a center of Igbo culture. Nri and Aguleri, where the Umueri-Igbo creation myth originates, are in the territory of the Umeuri clan, who trace their lineages back to the patriarchal king-figure, Eri. Eri's origins are unclear, though he has been described as a "sky being" sent by Chukwu (God).

Archaeological evidence suggests that Nri hegemony in Igboland may go back as far as the 9th century, and royal burials have been unearthed dating to at least the 10th century. Eri, the god-like founder of Nri, is believed to have settled the region around 948, with other related Igbo cultures following after in the 13th century. The first *eze Nri* (King of Nri), Ifikuánim, follows directly after him. According to Igbo oral tradition, his reign started in 1043. At least one historian puts Ifikuánim's reign much later, around 1225 AD.

In 1911, the names of 19 *eze Nri* were recorded, but the list is not easily converted into chronological terms because of long interregnums between installations. Tradition held that at least seven years would pass upon the death of the *eze Nri* before a successor could be determined; the interregnum served as a period of divination of signs from the deceased *eze Nri*, who would communicate his choice of successor from beyond the grave in the seven or more years ensuing upon his death. Regardless of the actual date, this period marks the beginning of Nri kingship as a centralized institution.

The Efik- Ibibio Political Institution

Among the Annang and Efik- Ibibio, the unit of political authority is vested in the extended family structure (lineage). It is called the Ekpuk (lineage or extended family). The nucleus is called Itibe Ekpuk, meaning literally the Royal Family. This is similar to

the title given to the founding family Ekpuk. While the founding family, (the Ekpuk) produces the Okuku Obong Obio and Amanayabo, whose office is marked by elaborate investiture, the Igbo exercised headships carrying honorific and religious status with insignificant political influence.

The traditional governance at the village level is the joint responsibility of the lineage heads or elders of the lineages (Ekpuk). In Cross River, the Okuku (the founding family) directs other lineage heads, like Amanayanabo. The office of Okuku and Amanayanabo is said to have been autocratic, and from time to time he exercised right of life and death over his subjects.

Between the founding family and lineage heads is sandwiched the office of Akpan Okuku, whose responsibilities are those of communication between Okuku and lineage heads. The Akpan Okuku is usually the most senior member among the lineage heads in the village council. And as the president of the village council, he is conferred with executive, judicial and administrative powers. The Annang village system of government does not allow anybody to rise to prominence as no one could possess power beyond his lineage level (Ekpuk).

It can also be observed that the political process of governance among the Efik- Ibibio groups differs in the distribution of power. For instance, the esopidung (village council) main function is religious. The political and judicial functions are handled by men who are appointed for this purpose. The functions they play, are regarded to be those of holding ministerial appointments. Such functions include other aspects of traditional economy.

The ministers are appointed from among a special class called, the Obong Order. This order is made up of royal members of the village council. With the Ekpuk heads and the Obong Order members, the Obong Ibio forms the village council, called Esopidung.

It is necessary to emphasise the fact that among the Efik- Ibibio, the bond of lineage and the village did not lie strictly in kinship/blood ties as in the case among the Igbo and Annang ethnic groups. This is explained by the fact that the lineage and village members belong to diverse ancestry who had migrated into the area from different settlements. Unity in the villages simply lies in the political autonomy, obligations, and the territorial isolation of the villages.

The Igbo Political Organisation

The traditional political system is based on the lineage structure. It consists of flexible democratic political systems, characterised by autonomous federations of lineages or villages, organised through lineage heads, age-grades and title societies. The age-grade and titled people cut across lineage lines. The body charged with decision-making processes is made up of representatives from lineages within the

autonomous political groupings.

The body of decision-makers can be grouped into five categories: first, traditional archetype where decisions are made by consensus among the lineage representative based on age, wealth or privilege, but have no overriding influence in selection. The second is a slight modification of the first in which members of title societies and lineage elders constitute the political decision-making group (this system is found among the Awka Igbo). The third is found among Cross River Igbo in Abriba, Chafia and Ar ochukwu, where secret societies dominate the political scene. The fourth category operates where age grade and lineage heads form the decision-making body. This is common in Asaba, Aguleri and Abriba. The fifth is found among the Nger Igbo (Ogbani, Oguta Abo, Onitsha and Osomari), where the political structure is hierarchical.

System of Decision- Making

We have indicated in our discussion that the units of political organisation among the peoples east of the Niger are the village and lineage levels. In the execution of political decisions or policies at the level of the lineage, two factors are used— the human and the supernatural. Also, the political and religious functions are distributed among the lineage representatives. Other organs of political and religious institutions can also be used in decision-making processes. For example, age grades are used in carrying out the legislative, executive and judicial decisions at the lineage and village levels. The use of age- grades is also classified. The oldest grade is normally co-opted into the village council when the need arises. In most cases, the role of the oldest grade is specified in the administration of oaths, offering sacrifices and initiating male members into secret cults. The role of the middle age-grade which is made up of successful business people is to assist the youths in military and social services. The lowest grade, the children, are used for public sanitation. Beyond these functions, the age grades organise public entertainment from time to time and assist in the maintenance of law and order and social control at both the village and lineage levels.

Exclusive Clubs

The term exclusive club is synonymous with secret society. The existence of exclusive club is a common feature in governance. The most prominent are the Ekpe and Ekpo (Ekpe means leopard and Ekpo — ghost or masquerade). The Ekpe and Ekpo are graded; each grade has its own peculiarities in dress, dance and rituals. Admission and advancement into and within any of the two clubs involves an elaborate ritual and monetary investments.

The Ekpel Ekpo represents the supreme authority in the maintenance of law and order. The two societies also represent a form of insurance policy for the living members, and a source of elaborate funeral ceremony for dead members. The functions of Ekpe/Ekpo include security duties and other civil intelligence

responsibilities at the village and family levels.

In the case of the Igbo, the masquerade (mmuo) club operates. In the Delta and Riverine areas, people used the owu. Memberships into masquerade clubs are however restricted. It is necessary to emphasise that both the executive and masquerade clubs as a rule, are often exclusively for men. Women play no significant political and religious roles.

Religion

Religion represents the pivot on which the system of social control is anchored for effective implementation. In fact, the concept of life among the Annang, Ibibio, Efik and Igbo can be mirrored in people's idea about god, spirit world, deities, ghosts and witches. According to their spiritual essence, all laws have supernatural/ancestral essence, and the lineage heads and eldest family member derive their political, judicial and social authorities from the invincible ancestors.

Social Control

Social control is made possible through the use of exclusive clubs (secret societies). Also the use of folk play in which young men and women entertain the public and use satirical and abusive songs against social deviants represent the popular technique for social control. Similarly, oath-taking, divination and oracles and other forms of social control, are designed to serve the purpose of controlling social deviants. Another known form of social control is the rites of passage. For example, the puberty rites of the Annang called Mbobo is aimed at ensuring that no teenage girl had sexual experience before Mbobo ceremony which leads to marriage.

The Judicial System

The adjudication of justice starts from the nuclear family. This is the first court over which the head presides to settle minor cases among immediate family members.

The next court is the lineage level in which the heads settle cases involving fighting, assault, theft, interfamily disputes, adultery and divorce cases between and among nuclear families. The third is the village court. It handles inter-lineage cases, over which the lineages could not reach consensus. However, where consensus could not be final, divination is used to adjudicate cases.